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Devotional Fulfillment

With Krishna's concluding comments after the *viśvarūpa darśana* episode, the Bhagavadgītā dialogue opens into a new critical phase. Of the 18 chapters of the Text, the first six, dealing with the spirituo-philosophical wisdom, expose primarily the universal Presence. It was described by Krishna as the unborn, undying, impersonal, self-luminous Soul animating the body and empowering all the organs of knowledge and activity.

The six chapters that follow instill a very strong overtone of devotion to the supreme Power. Krishna discusses at length Creation and Existence as an intriguing aggregate, describing what its constituents are and how these are interlinked to make a harmonious whole. In the process, Krishna also reveals how the whole creation is but an elusive and illusory mystery, despite its visible powers, potentials and possibilities (9.5).

On listening to the amazing nature of existence, its grounds as well as incredible grandeur, Arjuna wanted to have a glimpse of how the whole multi-pronged display emerges and prevails with all its interactional worth and purpose, despite its illusoriness and transitoriness. *Viśvarūpa* revelation transpired as a sequence.

To conceive the supreme Reality and foster a vibrant connection with It, the factor that counts first and last is guileless and wholesome devotion. Compared to the sublimity of such a devotional allegiance, all other disciplines and austerities are of no real value and effectiveness (11.53).

Enquiry about the two-fold devotional pursuit

The stunning declaration Krishna thus made on the supremacy and effectiveness of exclusive unreserved devotion, instantly makes Arjuna wonder how to relate Krishna's earlier advice to contemplate on the impersonal, imperishable Soul. So, he comes up with his enquiry.

Thus commences the 12th chapter of the battlefield dialogue with Arjuna's pertinent enquiry on what Krishna just said (11.55). The manner in which Krishna acknowledges Arjuna's enquiry and answers him, clarifying his doubt, thereby assuring and consoling him, deserves special attention. By this, Krishna sets a living example and guidance for all Teachers and Exponents as to how the seekers should be addressed on their mental and intellectual difficulties.

At no point of time, a genuine doubt of the seeker should be belittled or set aside. First give due place to the mind's problems, and then set forth the right thinking – not only bestowing clarity to the intelligence but also appeasing the mind. The objective should not be at any time to indulge in dialectics. The mind of the questioner is the supreme factor to be dealt with. Arjuna asks:

एवं सततयुक्ता ये भक्तास्त्वां पर्युपासते ।
ये चाप्यक्षरमव्यक्तं तेषां के योगवित्तमाः ॥

*evaṃ satata-yuktā ye bhaktās-tvāṃ paryupāsate ।
ye cāpy-akṣaram-avyaktaṃ teṣāṃ ke yoga-vittamāḥ ॥*

(12.1)

Those devotees, worshipping the supreme Reality with continuous, all-fold mental attunement, and the others given to exclusive contemplation upon the Imperishable Self – which of the two kinds does attain the fruition of Yoga best?

Arjuna's question is quite simple, but extremely practical. Krishna's stress at the end of the earlier chapter was two-fold: That to conceptualize the universal nature of the Supreme is something quite

rare; and to have an unquestioning acceptance of the Supreme, in spite of the fact that the world around constantly displays flagrant conflicts and contradictions, needs unflinching devotion.

Did not Krishna list a number of distinct notes constituting the vibrant creation and existence? The good and the beautiful have unquestioned place in creation. Equally so feature the bad and the ugly. The world juxtaposes the cruel with the gentle. The pairs of opposites exist in an inextricable mixture.

This gives no room for any mind to foster strong preferences or prejudices. Total acceptance of whatever is, together with full reliance on its causal source, alone is the right course. To embrace whatever comes without any trouble or torment, at the same time be lovingly devoted to the Supreme, the Lord of all, is normally not easy at all. However, such exclusiveness will give ample release and a sense of assurance to the seeker that everything will go on well.

Naturally Arjuna felt an affinity for the wholesome devotional approach. At the same time, Krishna had elaborately explained how the whole world is but ephemeral, *asat* (2.16, 17). **While transitoriness of existence is easily visible before the senses, its eternal substratum will be understood only by the enquiring intelligence.** The eternal is the cause and substratum of all existence and expression. Can any rational person disregard this fact and fall a prey to the transitory?

Thus arises the question as to which of the two kinds of seekers and *sādhakas* – those given to worshipping the Supreme through all their words, deeds and thoughts in a functional and interactional manner, or the others given to pure contemplation on the subtlest imperishable Presence – is better. One is a regular interactional pursuit, and the other a dispassionate contemplative approach.

Devotional attunement

Krishna had no hesitation in answering Arjuna:

मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ।

श्रद्धया परयोपेतास्ते मे युक्ततमा मताः ॥

mayy-āveśya mano ye mām nitya-yuktā upāsate ।

śraddhayā parayopetās-te me yukta-tamā matāḥ ॥

(12.2)

There is no doubt that those, with their mind attuned to the Supreme, through constant infusion, impelled by the highest attitude and aim, are the most united.

In very few words, Krishna again describes the path of wholesome devotion. He makes reference to no paraphernalia the devotees are found to be associated with. **Krishna's prescription of supreme devotion consists solely of the mind and intelligence.** Both should be fully attuned to the devotional goal, namely the Supreme. And in so doing, the devotees should be free of all narrow worldly thoughts, desires or motivations. The highest attitude and aim alone should inspire and guide them in their resignation and exclusiveness (*śraddhayā parayā upetāḥ*).

Thus, supreme or exclusive devotion is a quality and enrichment adorning the mind and intelligence. The two inner constituents in man, namely the mind and intelligence, must remain wedded to the Supreme through a note of full attunement and identity. There should be no distraction or aberration due to divergent thoughts or ambitions. When this is ensured, says Krishna, it unites the devotees best. But he does not stop there.

Contemplation of the Imperishable

In contrast, what about the others, becomes the next question. Krishna has a clear answer to this too. But in spelling out his verdict he becomes more specific and deep. Thus come forth the following two verses, where he refers to 'worshippers' of the Imperishable, as he puts it:

ये त्वक्षरमनिर्देश्यमव्यक्तं पर्युपासते ।

सर्वत्रगमचिन्त्यं च कूटस्थमचलं ध्रुवम् ॥

सन्नियम्येन्द्रियग्रामं सर्वत्र समबुद्धयः ।

ते प्राप्नुवन्ति मामेव सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥

*ye tvakṣaram-anirdeśyam-avyaktaṃ paryupāsate ।
sarvatragam-acintyaṃ ca kūṭastham-acalaṃ dhruvam ॥
sanniyamyendriyagrāmaṃ sarvatra sama-buddhayaः ।
te prāpñuvanti mām-eva sarva-bhūta-hite ratāः ॥*

(12.3, 4)

Those, on the other hand, given to the all-fold contemplation of the Imperishable also reach the supreme Reality alone. Although they are given to contemplate upon the qualities of the Imperishable, namely unthinkability, all-permeation, ineffability, eternality, immobility, unmanifestness and immutability, they should be imbued with ample sense-restraint and equal-vision. They must equally foster a constant note for the welfare of all creatures.

He first of all defines what the other kind of worship, namely contemplation on the Imperishable (*akṣara*) is. In it, the seeker's focus will be on the subtle qualities of the supreme Reality, as against the form, shape, etc. As does space in the visible world, so reigns the Imperishable as the ground or substratum for the whole illusory creation.

Of the five constituents (*pañca-bhūtas*), the gross four are quite visible and distinct. But in the fifth, *ākāśa* (space), no such distinctness or decipherability is possible. Yet, that it exists is a fact. Just as *ākāśa* is cognized, the Imperishable substratum of the whole perishable creation should also be comprehended.

Seekers of the Imperishable are left with only its salient qualities to help and guide their contemplation. Krishna thus refers to some of the characteristics of the Imperishable – like permanence, all-pervasiveness, immovability, inconceivability (*acintya*), etc. Each of these words does and should convey a great deal to the minds of seekers of the Imperishable. Intelligence should grasp these characteristics, and introspect over them as deeply and wholesomely as possible.

Krishna is very particular that on the ground of their contemplation upon the Imperishable, the seekers should not breed any indifference or inattention in any matter. Attention, moderation, discipline, refinement and benevolence, which are indispensable virtues to enrich interactional life, must remain very dear to them. Untold neglect and disregard often thrive in the seekers' minds, in the name of spirituality. Krishna does not approve of any such lack or disharmony.

Sensory discipline, thus, says Krishna, should constitute an important part of the Imperishable-worship. True spiritual pursuit should inaugurate a life of expansion and elevation. Liberality and universal acceptance must be the conspicuous traits of excellent spiritual life. Keeping this in mind, Krishna emphasizes that the seekers and Knowers must have an abiding interest in the welfare of all beings in the world (*sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*).

Worship or contemplation of the Imperishable does not and cannot brook any kind of callousness or neglect towards anything of creation. Instead, the love for the Imperishable must stimulate a deep fondness for everything around. For, the whole creation has emerged from the Imperishable. **Whatever expansion the usual life is unable to bring about, spiritual pursuit must.** Only then such an effort becomes magnificent. *Sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* (engaged in the welfare of all beings) are Krishna's words on this fundamental point. Of all people in the world, the spiritual Knower is the one who can display, without any fear, an all-fold love and benevolence.

While explaining the concept of true sannyāsa (renunciation) in the 5th chapter, Krishna has used the same words '*sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*'. From this, it is clear how Krishna is emphatic about the fact that spiritual life should always ensure and promote all-fold welfare of the world. Once this is ensured, even those seekers given to the love of the Imperishable will reach the same Supreme.

Having said this, Krishna immediately adds:

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ।

अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥

kleśo'dhikataras-teṣām-avyaktāsakta-cetasām ।

avyaktā hi gatiṛ-du:khaṃ dehavadbhir-avāpyate ॥

(12.5)

The hindrance is more for those who are given to the path of contemplation on the Imperishable. Because of identity with their bodies, it is very difficult for them to get attuned to the imperishable goal.

This should answer as well as console Arjuna. Here Krishna admits **that living in a body**, it is very difficult for anyone to begin **to think that he is not the body**. It is easy to accept that the one living in a house does not become the house at all. He is but its resident. So too, to live in your body should instantly make you know that you are not the body.

The distinction between the body and its indweller is not difficult to understand, once you begin to think in this manner. But somehow, the delusion at work is so widespread and deep-rooted that people in general, find it difficult to get at the body-different Soul. Krishna recognizes this common trouble and agrees that the thought and contemplation of the Imperishable, as a pursuit, is indeed difficult.

But this is no hindrance at all. For, the words Krishna uses in the first line are “*kleśaḥ adhikatarah*”, meaning **difficulty in this case is more**. By using the comparative degree, he clearly alludes that in the other path, the path of devotion, as well there is *kleśaḥ*, hardship.

To be an exclusive devotee, thereby to steep all one's actions, words, thoughts and understanding in the fondness and reliance towards the Supreme, is not very easy. You have to be constantly active variously, at the same time think that all that you do is not for your own sake, but for the sake of the Supreme. Does it not mean annihilating and obliterating all possessiveness? To shed the ego and install the Supreme in its place is, in a way, to lose all thoughts of self-importance and personal desires. This too is rare and in a way difficult for the ordinary people.

Likewise, while pursuing the path of seeking the Imperishable, a constant contemplation on the imperishable, impersonal and impartial Absolute has to be preserved. It virtually means disowning all actions, as Krishna has described earlier (verses 2.19, 5.8 & 5.9). To be doing, speaking, thinking, etc. and equally to be dispossessing all these, constitutes a seemingly grave contradiction. It naturally calls for a very high degree of spiritual perception. For embodied people, says Krishna, such loftiness may appear to be more difficult. What is the conclusion or exhortation? Devotional path, as he has described, is relatively easier and better.

Role of Intelligence in Devotion

Krishna clearly said that ‘wholesome worship’ of the Supreme is easier than seeking the Imperishable, although the latter path has its own distinct status and appeal. In verses 12.6 to 12.8, he explains what this wholesome devotion means and why it proves easy and practicable for ordinary people. If the seeker scrutinizes and understands well what Krishna says, he will find what the true nature of devotional pursuit is and how it ultimately rests solely on oneself – the seeker’s mind and intelligence.

ये तु सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि सन्न्यस्य मत्पराः ।
अनन्येनैव योगेन मां ध्यायन्त उपासते ॥
तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
भवामि न चिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥

*ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sannasya matparāḥ ।
ananyenaiva yogena māṃ dhyāyanta upāsate ॥
teṣām-ahaṃ samuddhartā mṛtyu-saṃsāra-sāgarāt ।
bhavāmi na cirāt-pārtha mayyāveśita-cetasām ॥*

(12.6, 7)

For those who surrender all their actions to the Supreme and worship the Supreme with exclusive unwavering meditation, the Supreme very soon becomes a deliverer from the death-ridden worldly life. For, O son of Pṛtha, such people are attuned to the Supreme wholesomely.

Therefore, the best to do will be to fix the mind on the Supreme, fix the intelligence also on the Supreme. Once the devotee ensures this mind-intelligence attunement with the Supreme, he will virtually be dwelling in the Supreme, not in the perishable world.

Krishna's words are quite unambiguous and their meaning and implication are not complex at all. He is emphasizing only two points: **Wholesome interest and reliance on the Supreme**. Once these become true of the devotee, they inevitably lead to the sense of renunciation. But the renunciation in this case is not one of total negation and relinquishment of all actions. Instead, it is one of **offering one's activities in full to the Supreme**. The motivation or compulsion to make such a dedicated renunciation arises because the devotee's mind is filled with only one interest, that of the Supreme.

Generally the world is considered to be different from God or the Supreme, and therefore, worldly interactions do not appear to be divine or sublime. Because of this *bheda-buddhi* (differential notion) the mind inherently suffers from, all the so called worldly activities seem to bring conflicts in the mind of the seeker. They distance the seeker from the Supreme instead of linking him to his goal.

Krishna wants the seeker to drop and outlive any such differential notes, and install in their place a vision of all-fold divinity. **Instead of making the seeker distanced from the Supreme, interactions in the world should bring to him a greater touch of the Supreme**. This is called devotional wholesomeness. This fundamental change, however strange or difficult it may seem, is certainly possible, and that is the crux of the whole devotional sādhanā.

This means, the seeker **should not the least divide** his activities as **devotional** and **non-devotional**, as **spiritual** and **worldly**, feeling that the two are contradictory. All actions equally take place within the ken of creation. And everything has its ground as well as sustenance in the same Supreme. The entire universe is a display of the Supreme.

Right from the 7th chapter, it is this aspect of wholesome divinity that Krishna has been explaining and emphasizing repeatedly, from different points of view. Till chapter 6, it was a deep philosophical exposition about the nature of perceptions, their transitory and elusive character and the art and wisdom of dealing with them harmoniously and effectively.

In the past five chapters, Krishna has made it amply clear that there is nothing like the spiritual and material, godly and worldly, contradicting each other. It is all a Grand display of the One, viewed differently. The elemental world itself is a godly outcome. To be within it, interacting and experiencing its majesty, is itself quite enriching and elevating, provided one can rise to the level of wholesome perception. To help such a benevolent and edifying outlook did he expatiate so much on what creation is, how the creator remains linked in and through all. At the same time, he also explained how in the ultimate analysis **the whole display is but a sensory illusion.**

By this, his purpose was to dissuade the seeker from all undue attachment to the transitory world, and make the mind sufficiently detached and dispassionate, so that it will be able to cherish wholesome devotional sublimity. With the revelation of *viśva-rūpa*, Arjuna came to know just in an instant how a single source can give rise to the whole complex creational display. **The whole world around can be brought into being as well as withdrawn just in an instant, thereby showing how its source is quite distinct and supreme.**

In such a background, to think of the Supreme and remain mentally connected thereto will be a very natural process for the seeker. Krishna wants seekers to pursue this point of view and make it the sole basis for wholesome devotion. He says: “Link every act, without distinction, to the Supreme, as and when it is performed.” **The attitude a seeker usually has towards a special religious act, must equally govern all actions in general.**

Every action should be identified with the Supreme, which is the cause of the entire creation. This will be so, provided the devotee’s

sole interest becomes the Supreme and the Supreme alone (*mat-parah*). When the all-enfolding nature of the Supreme is conceived, to pin all interest and concern on It should not be difficult. Rather, that will become the natural step. To ensure that such an all-fold interest and dedication grows deep and constant, the seeker has to take to sufficient contemplation. **His whole worship must be in the way of contemplation or meditation.** That alone touches and involves the mind and intelligence of the seeker. That is why Krishna enjoins contemplation as the necessary corollary of this wholesome devotional pursuit.

How the Supreme redeems the devotee

Now comes the immediate result or fruition of such exclusive seeking: For those who remain exclusive in their devotion to the Supreme, says Krishna, the Supreme soon stands as the deliverer (*na cirāt samuddhartā bhavāmi*). The devotee is delivered from what? From worldliness, which is full of death or transitoriness. Transitoriness implies death, in the sense that when anything undergoes change, its present content or character changes into something else. This transition or replacement, in other words, means death or destruction. Hence the transitory world is death-full too.

To attain immortality is to be delivered from the transitory worldliness. In place of fear, anxiety or agitation, which worldly life imposes, the devotee will start feeling natural and harmonious with everything. **It is not a physical escape at the gross level, but is a subtle inner spiritual redemption, which one experiences while living and moving in the world.**

And this happens only by dint of the single attunement – *mayyāveśita-cetasām*. The minds of such devotees are completely fused into the Supreme, through devotional fondness, recognition and renunciation. Do not think whether spirituo-devotional pursuits have a remote fruition, or such fruition is available only after the body falls. True spiritual life is to be adopted while living **here and now**. It is unlike ritualistic life that promises rewards to be gained after the fall of the body.

The difference between the focus of spiritual life and that of ritualistic life thus becomes quite clear. What Krishna said in 2nd chapter, while introducing karma yoga (2.49) is fully authenticated by his words here. The whole change is worked by the devotee's mind and intelligence. The seeker has to develop the right perception (2.50).

Therefore what should earnest devotees do, and what is the exact nature of their devotional wholesomeness? Krishna gives out a twin formula for the wholesome devotional seekers:

मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय ।
निवसिष्यसि मय्येव अत ऊर्ध्वं न संशयः ॥

*mayy-eva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṃ niveśaya ।
nivasisyasi mayy-eva ata ūrdhvaṃ na saṃśaya: ॥*

(12.8)

Fix your mind on the Supreme alone, and then establish the intelligence too in the same Supreme. If you do so, you will abide in the Supreme from that moment onwards. There is no doubt at all.

What a simple, revealing statement, nay a divine assurance! By this, Krishna confirms what he said earlier at the beginning of his narration in this chapter. There (12.2) he used a different set of words, but laid down the same proposition indicating that the devotee's mind should be fully infused in the Supreme, through exclusiveness of reliance and dedication.

Here he does not say all that. No adjective, no colourful description. He simply says that the mind and intelligence should be dissolved in the thought and reliance of the Supreme. Within the body of anyone, there are only two personality factors: the mind and the intelligence. Mind consists of memories, thoughts and emotions. Each of these has its force and persuasion to propel sensory activities. Intelligence, given constantly to knowledge and its pursuit, delights in reason, enquiry and analysis. By this, it propels the mind, giving it directions from time to time.

From emotion to intelligence

In fact, the mind should constantly heed the intelligence, adhere to what it points out. If the intelligence too does not get riveted to spiritual or devotional reliance and dedication, then the mind's fusion with the Supreme will get shaken. There will arise conflicts. This is what generally intercepts the devotional progress and fruition.

It is not sufficient if one gets emotionally drawn to the Supreme. That will have no long-lasting effect, unless the knowing intelligence also participates in the process, and the two remain integrated. The knowledge and exposure that intelligence gets must be such as to persuade the mind to follow the path of spiritual dedication and renunciation, with sublimation.

What is in fact, Krishna's purpose by this dialogue? What was Arjuna's state, when the dialogue began? He was in tearful confusion. He had laid down his bow and arrow with the final words "Krishna, I will not fight this war."

His emotional mind led him to such a miserable step. By whom and how will such a plight be treated? Intelligence alone has the power and means to act upon the mind any time. This means that enquiry, higher investigation, knowledge and the compulsions arising from them will alone do the magic and bring about the desired change.

Did not Krishna explain in sufficient detail (7.4) what is true Divinity, how it consists of eight constituents beginning with earth? Is not all that a genuine treatment to the intelligence? The whole dialogue is nothing but a full-fledged intelligential treat to the seeker.

Take Śreemad Bhāgavatam for instance. Its 18,000 verses deal with the subject of devotion, God, Self and the world, the divine character of everything visible and invisible. By reading and reflecting upon this beautiful narration, both the intelligence and the mind get sublimated, enriched with spiritual and philosophical magnificence.

Most of the devotees, however, just listen to the great narration and enjoy the unique ecstasy the text provides. They do not get into the depths of its message, the profundity of the text, as did the first listener, King Pareekshit!

Left to itself, mind is desultory, unbridled. If its thoughts, responses and attitudes are to be transformed or refined, then intelligence will have to intercept the course and give its own corrective and sublimating inputs. **This unique role of proper guidance played by the intelligence will result in integration of the devotional personality.**

It is a grave mistake to think that devotion is all emotional, and the mind and heart alone are involved in its pursuit. One must understand that mind merely sub-serves the intelligence, and **intelligence is the one to be properly refined and stabilized.** And for this, wisdom is the only effective input any time. Any devotee, sooner or later, will have to find his way to a proper Teacher who can give him the right guidance, enlightenment and spiritual resolve, to steer his mind. This is what is happening in the case of Arjuna also.

Remember what Krishna said in the 10th chapter (10.10): “To those given to worshipping the Supreme wholeheartedly, the Supreme bestows **buddhi-yoga** – the yoga of wisdom – by virtue of which they will be able to attain the Supreme.”

How does this wisdom-yoga work? What is its special relevance to the devotee? Krishna clarified that too (10.11): “Out of compassion, the Supreme, dwelling in their within, ignites the lamp of knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance from their mind.” And they are able to understand what is the truth about themselves, about the Supreme, and where exactly reigns the focus of spiritual attainment.

Whether it is the path of devotion or any other, finally it is a question of the devotee’s intelligence getting properly purified and illumined. Mind and intelligence together have to strive for the pursuit and bring about its right fruition.

That is why Krishna said in the 2nd chapter (2.49): “All the activities, in whichever name they are performed, are far inferior to *buddhi-yoga* – the pursuit of wisdom that makes one even-minded. Therefore, O Arjuna, seek refuge under *buddhi*.”

Devotional ascent

Devotional practice, in truth, is a wholesome pursuit. It involves and occupies the mind and intelligence of the seeker. But, can all take to such an inward, wholesome pursuit, wherein the mind and intelligence alone are involved? The study of the humans has clearly shown that such a wholesome inner devotional pursuit is not feasible for many. Naturally, the question arises as to what should one do to express his devotional affinity and pursue the same effectively to its natural goal?

Krishna answers this proposition quite well. The very purpose of *sāstras* is not to exclude any category of people. Instead, the scriptural stand is to embrace one and all. For, only then the *sāstras* will be fulfilling their role as the mother of one and all. Krishna thus lists one step after the other, which can be taken up and pursued by those who are not able to take to devotional wholesomeness in their mind and intelligence:

अथ चित्तं समाधातुं न शक्नोषि मयि स्थिरम् ।

अभ्यासयोगेन ततो मामिच्छाप्तुं धनञ्जय ॥

atha cittam samādhātuṃ na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram ।

abhyāsa-yogena tato mām-icchāptuṃ dhanañjaya ॥

(12.9)

If you cannot devote your mind fully to the Supreme in an attitude of devotional resignation and acceptance, the next best step will be to take to yoga of practice. Thereby aspire to reach the Supreme.

That is why we have developed the system of Temple worship and other similar practices. How many temples are there! How many holy places too! Pilgrimage to distant shrines and holy spots, taking bath in various confluences of rivers, adhering to bodily, oral and inner

disciplines and vows – like *upavāsa* (fast) – come under these devotional steps.

The variety of rituals Krishna described in the fourth chapter (4.24-32), including *prāṇāyāma*, also come under this *abhyāsa* (practice) category. Whatever be the nature of the practice, each is meant to have its effect on the sādhaika's gross and subtle personality. In this land, a variety of austerities, disciplines and practices are in vogue. Some of them are stunning to see or to think about. If one takes care to go into their genesis, relevance and utility, he is bound to recognize how diverse the human mind is, and what an astounding variety of aspirations, temptations and predilections it harbours.

While Krishna gives ample scope for a variety of effective devotional practices, the need to exercise timely discretion to distinguish the right and promotional practices from the wrong and derogatory indulgences cannot be overstated. Whatever practice is resorted to, should imply austerity, purity and refinement. Offering *śayana pradakṣiṇā* (rolling on the ground around the Temple on the pathway), for instance, something very common with devotees, is a harmless, but intensely austere devotional practice. The intention is to roll on the dust of the devotees' feet.

But Krishna does not stop there. He knows quite well that not all are given to devotional thoughts or affinity. For those who lack devotional susceptibility, there are other options, says Krishna. He does not want to keep anyone away from the immense benefit of devotion:

अभ्यासेऽप्यसमर्थोऽसि मत्कर्मपरमो भव ।

मदर्थमपि कर्माणि कुर्वन्सिद्धिमवाप्स्यसि ॥

abhyāse'py-asamartho'si mat-karma-paramo bhava ।

mad-artham-api karmāṇi kurvan-siddhim-avāpsyasi ॥

(12.10)

Even if you are unable to take to any practice, surrender all actions to the Supreme. Doing all actions for the sake of the Supreme, you will attain fulfilment.

Abhyāsa or practice is always a time-bound effort. But when an all-fold general attitude like *mat-karma-paramatva* is adopted, it works in association with all that one does. It is a wholesome, sublime and all-embracing note. To enable such wholesomeness, the intelligence has to be active and provide the necessary insight and motivation.

We are born into this world, when our body is delivered by the mother. Ever since, the body rests on the earth. Does the earth belong to anyone? The air we breathe also has no claimant. So too, the water, sun, moon or other life-sources have no visible ownership. Wherefrom do all our actions originate? Who designed them? Where to do all of them proceed? There cannot be a doubt or question about the answer. Whatever or whoever is the progenitor of our earth and whichever Power or Presence preserves it, to the same source alone are directed all our activities and movements.

Dedicate the whole of your activities to the Supreme, and nurse this feeling throughout. Let not the ego or any sense of possessiveness interfere. This is more an attitude-culture – an inner orientation, growing a sense of belonging and dedication. The wholesome allegiance that emerges from such an attitude, should survive, getting only strengthened every time. All the attention and focus must be towards this. If the devotee pursues this kind of all-action or all-fold attunement, that in itself will be a full-fold *sādhana*, and it will lead him to spiritual perfection and fulfillment.

Krishna is sufficiently considerate and thoughtful. He always upholds wholesome, all-embracing nature. Thus he adds that even if one is not able to take to this kind of wholesome dedication and attunement, there is an effective alternative:

अथैतदप्यशक्तोऽसि कर्तुं मद्योगमाश्रितः ।

सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं ततः कुरु यतात्मवान् ॥

athaitadapy-aśakto'si kartuṃ mad-yogam-āśrita: ।

sarva-karma-phala-tyāgaṃ tata: kuru yatātmavān ॥

(12.11)

If remaining attuned to the Supreme, you are unable to do even this, then take to the practice of self-control and abandon inwardly all kinds of subjective results accruing from actions.

Even if the path of wholesome attunement is not found suitable or feasible, says Krishna, do not lose heart. There is still another alternative. Adopt the principle of self-control. Let a consistent note of moderation and control be there in speech, thought and action. Self-restraint, indispensable for healthy individual and social life, is something all can accept and also imbibe. But something more should be there to make the seeking fruitful and fulfilling. The seeker must make it a point to keep away from the mind's dual involvement, namely the feeling of desirability and undesirability about the results his actions fetch.

Needless to say, the *karma-phala* that Bhagavadgītā speaks of is **not objective** at all. It is the **subjective triple results**: *iṣṭa*, *aniṣṭa* and *miśra* (desired, undesired and a mixture of the two). When these triple notes are abandoned, it ensures the inner welfare and progress of the seeker.

Knowledge and Meditation – the core of devotion

Having said this much about the different levels and degrees of devotional practices and their feasibility, Krishna pronounces a comparative assessment about the whole matter:

श्रेयो हि ज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्धानं विशिष्यते ।

ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम् ॥

śreyo hi jñānam-abhyāsāj-jñānād-dhyānaṃ viśiṣyate ।

dhyānāt-karma-phala-tyāgas-tyāgācchāntir-anantaram ॥

(12.12)

Knowledge is surely better than practices, and meditative introspection is superior to mere knowledge. From such reflective meditation, results renunciation of the internal results of action, and from that follows peace or contentment.

Practice in any field has great importance and effects. But in the field of devotion, *ācāras*, namely formalities and practices are far below *vicāra*, dedicated introspection or reflective recession (*dhyāna*). The plight of Arjuna himself reveals this. It is not that he was not an austere person. The deficiency was that he was not given to reflection – reflecting upon values, enrichment and also the goal of life. That is why even after thirteen years of severe austerities, he crumbled in Kurukshetra, just when he was in front of Bheeshma, Drona and the rest, as if he did not expect them to fight against him!

What was there new at all in their participation in the fateful war? Arjuna's debility was sheerly the lack of proper insight, wisdom, which calls for sufficient reflection and sense of enquiry. In such a context, Krishna's words become amply meaningful and relevant. In fact, all devotees and seekers should imbibe what Krishna says with extra attention.

Krishna rates *jñāna* (wisdom) as superior to mere practice. True devotional life thrives on a variety of practices and ceremonies. They are believed to carry a substantial measure of sanctity too. But the truth is that in all of them, employment of senses – oral or actional – plays the major part. Action is an outward expression, whereas wisdom is an inward dawning or fruition.

How far any religious practice is able to generate true wisdom, is the crucial question to evaluate its real merit. Did not Krishna say that all actions have their finale or consummation in *jñāna*, wisdom (4.33)? Of all *yajñas*, *jñāna-yajña* – not *dravya-yajña* – is superior and most fruitful, he said. Gaining knowledge, the degree to which any act or practice engenders knowledge, is the true criterion in evaluating devotional life.

While the cow eats fodder and other concentrates, does the animal ever know the relative merits of what it takes? The animal obviously does not have any idea of nourishment and the value of each item of its food. But, a man knows and is also taught about the need

and quality of nourishment and the value each item of food contains in this regard. To do something does not mean to know all about what is done. Knowledge calls for distinct efforts.

People who are devoted to God are not able to make their devotion wholesome and fulfilling, only because they fail to know well what their devotion and the object of devotion mean and imply. If only the comprehensive nature of the Supreme is brought home or comprehended by devotees, they cannot but become exclusive and wholesome in their devotional attunement. To enter the human core and bring about qualitative change or improvement, knowledge alone is effective. It is indispensable.

Krishna's evaluation or assessment, thus, is that knowledge and the effort to gain it is better than any kind of practice. **No practice is worthy unless it conduces to emergence of knowledge in the practitioner.**

Vājaśravas of Kaṭhōpaniṣad did an elaborate *yāga*, and the son, Nachiketas, found that the holy sacrifice was being vitiated by his father because of disharmonious and improper attitude. While the performer continued to foster the harmful tendencies, looking at the whole performance, Nachiketas felt greatly concerned. This led to the son's illumination and the father's degeneration. What better example is needed to show clearly that true knowledge is far more effective than mere ritualistic or ceremonial indulgence?

The knowledge Krishna refers to, is the spiritual knowledge, the one relating to the Subject within oneself, which is noted for its sublimating and elevating effect. Any subjective, inner effect can be expected only by rumination or introspection. And that is why Krishna holds meditation to be even greater than mere scholarly knowledge which is generally a derivative of intelligence. By meditation alone, the seeker has a chance to know the mind, its vagaries and dross, and to strive to redress these. A person averse to meditation – no matter whether he is a devotee or not – cannot grow spiritually.

The first half of the statement thus means: Knowledge is superior to practice, and greater than knowledge is meditation. In the second half too, the message conveyed is *dhyānāt karmaphala-tyāgaḥ*: From assiduous meditation alone, the seeker will be able to be free from the bondage of the *karma-phala*. Meditation will instill purity to his mind, and that in turn will bestow contentment and peace.

Dhyānāt means: “from meditation”. To instill the spirit and content of renunciation, the seeker has to be enriched and empowered by meditation and its benefits. The fallacy of fostering the twin-attitude of desirable and undesirable, happiness and unhappiness will be clearly sensed by the meditative mind. That in turn will give the seeker untold strength to take to any activity wholeheartedly, disregarding what it may fetch in the form of objective result. In acting itself, he finds sufficient joy. He does not carry any risk, indecision or fear about actions or their place and purpose in life.

Assiduous introspection on human life, the nature of objects, their ultimate place in our mind is an essential corollary of spiritual life, and hence devotional life too. Krishna concludes the sequence by stating, “*tyāgāt śāntiḥ anantaram*”, meaning, peacefulness results from such renunciation. The divisive outlook instantly brings strong preference and prejudice, likes and dislikes, leading to all kinds of agitation and distraction.

The question before the seeker is quite conclusive: Do the objects and their impact overpower him, or will his mind overwhelm all kinds of inputs from objects and get enriched and empowered constantly?

The point to be understood is that though Krishna elucidates the path of devotion, he makes it an occasion to lead the devotee to grow inwardly and imbibe expansion. **Devotional sādhanā may appear to revolve around the Supreme, but in reality it is revolving round the devotee’s inner being itself.** If this primary message is understood and acted upon, how great the benefits will be!

Krishna has completed his dissertation on devotion and devotional sādhanā. What he states further is a description of who are the best of devotees whom he would like most, thereby giving a practical insight into the character and interactions of devotees.



2

Qualities that Make a Devotee Dear to the Lord

In answer to Arjuna's enquiry, Krishna described the characteristics of the stable-minded person (2.54-72). He also explained elaborately the spiritual vision, interactional attitude and behavioural sublimity of the Knower. Here now Krishna discusses devotion, and to complete the exposition, he vividly explains how and when does one become a devotee, and what kind of devotee will be pleasing to the Supreme. All those who walk on the path of devotion cannot escape the standards and refinement Krishna sets forth. With every statement Krishna adds that such a devotee alone is pleasing to the Supreme.

Any ardent student will strive to please his teacher. A good follower will no doubt be keen to please his leader. An efficient minister's wont will be to please his King. Likewise, a devotee must also aim to please his Lord. Krishna uses this point of sentimentality as well as ideological persuasion to drive home to the seekers how their devotional pursuit should not fail to incorporate a set of standards, restraints, moderation and refinement.

This particular section, called the *bhakta-lakṣaṇas* (the characteristics of a devotee), comes as a beautiful finale in this *bhakti-yoga* chapter. These eight concluding verses describe who is the right, best and pleasing devotee. By that, Krishna also presents the whole devotional science, practice, goal and its realization in a very precise note. These verses, like the section on *sthītaprajñā*, are to be used for daily recitation and reflection. One verse or another will always come handy, with its unique relevance and message, every time.

Devotion must give rise to inner expansion

Krishna makes a significant and touching beginning:

अद्वेष्या सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥
सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥

*adveṣṭā sarva-bhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca ।
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣamī ॥
santuṣṭaḥ satatam yogī yatātmā dṛḍha-niścayaḥ ।
mayy-arpita-mano-buddhir-yo mad-bhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ ॥*
(12-14)

Free of hatred to all beings, friendly and kind to all, free of possessiveness and egoism, equal in unhappiness and happiness, forbearing, ever contented, inwardly integrated with senses and mind well-disciplined, having firm conviction, with mind and intelligence fully resting on the Supreme – such a devotee is dear to the Supreme.

Krishna has already spoken in detail about *rāga* and *dveṣa*, *kāma* and *krodha*, as spelling doom for the seeker. Did he not say that these are the stark enemies and that the seeker should not come under their sway (3.34)? Hatred or resentment towards anyone can agitate and ruin the mind to any extent. He insists that a devotee must scrupulously eliminate all notes of hatred, intolerance and resentment towards not alone human beings, but all creatures in the world.

To be devoted to the Supreme means to eliminate from the mind all forms of dislike or intolerance towards anyone or anything. In doing so alone does devotion become interactional and wholesome. The devotee should find out by introspection the constricting and anti-spiritual notes in his mind and intelligence. In the name of devotion itself, he should eliminate them. This process of elimination of unspiritual notes is the active part of devotional *sādhana*. It should be given utmost importance. **Compared to worship with any material,**

this inner examination including purging of wrong traits, is far superior. It pleases the Lord more than anything else.

Devotional efforts do not stop when mind becomes free of resentment and hatred. Simultaneously, a definite note of friendliness should be fostered towards all. That alone will bring about real growth and expansion to the devotee. Everybody naturally grows love and concern for his family members, but not so for the others – a clear sense of division and partiality. This should be transcended and all-fold fraternity should be cultivated as much as possible. Devotional life means imbibing such wholehearted benevolence, says Krishna.

To foster love and concern is not sufficient, says Krishna. The loving devotee must also want to do something to help others. This emphasis is in line with what Krishna said while describing the *akṣara-upāsanā* (12.3-4), where he uses the profound phrase ‘*sarva-bhūta-hite-ratāḥ*’. The devotional seeker’s thoughts, words and deeds will have a definite move towards the welfare of others in general. That is the desired expansion of the devotional heart. Such expansion is characteristic of a true devotee.

Krishna next refers to the devotee’s inner framework, which must imbibe the basic and ultimate spiritual qualities. *Nirmamatva* means transcending the sense of mineness or possessiveness. *Nir-ahaṅkāratva* means being free of ego. Undue pride or ostentation comes under *ahaṅkāra*. Absence of doership, enjoyership and sufferership with regard to actions done as well as their consequences, is an inevitable devotional refinement. About this Krishna has already spoken in the *sthita-prajña* section (2.71).

Krishna has described earlier how earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intelligence and ego constitute the eightfold Nature of the Supreme (7.4 & 5). In these constituents ego also finds a place. Thus the ego is to enable and facilitate our life on earth. To the extent it coordinates the sensory, mental and intellectual activities, it is desirable and indispensable. But it should not give rise to any undue attachment, ownership or causality. The ego, when properly reflected upon, denotes

the 'I', which should lead the seeker to the thought of the Self in its universal magnitude. If, instead of instilling freedom and expansion, the ego brings bondage and constriction, that is bad. Krishna provides the necessary safeguard to avoid such misfortune.

Sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ is the next quality Krishna emphasizes. This is an oft-repeated phrase of Krishna in Bhagavadgītā. He started speaking about *samatva* (equality) right from the beginning (2.15), and it has been repeated all through (2.38, 56, 57; 4.22; 5.19, 20, 23, 26; 6.9). No devotee can distance himself from this essential quality. *Sukha-duḥkhas* are the twin mental creations of the world at any time in anyone. To be equal to them would be to win over the world, sublimating all its effects.

Krishna defined life as *mātrā-sparsāḥ* (2.14) - interaction between the senses and the world objects. Without the senses contacting their objects in the world, no experience or knowledge can transpire. And whenever such sense-object interaction takes place, it inevitably evokes *sukha-duḥkhas*. While these interactions are external, *sukha-duḥkhas* they generate are internal. These being inevitable, where is the question of avoiding either *sukha* or *duḥkha* in life? So, he said, " *tān titikṣasva - forbear them*".

So, to forbear *sukha-duḥkha*, which interactions in the world are bound to bring about repeatedly, is a basic quality of the seeker. But it is something to be gained by understanding the nature of life, world and the interactions between the two. In fact, **all spiritual qualities have their genesis in right understanding**. Krishna also added that one who is not tormented by *sukha-duḥkhas*, by dint of the equal vision he cultivates towards them, becomes fit for winning immortality, liberation (2.15).

A devotee should be patient, *kṣamī*, is what Krishna states next. It implies tolerance, an enlightened reconciliation with whatever comes and proceeding forward with resolve and dedication. It is an inner spiritual enrichment, resulting from the right understanding of how life courses through the worldly vicissitudes. The vision has to be

broad enough to incorporate all possibilities and eventualities in life and in the world.

Cheerfulness is another characteristic of true devotion. If the devotee is aspiring for the Supreme alone, it should make him look for nothing else as a gain or goal. Such a dedicated mind is naturally free of all desires and expectations, with the result that it will remain cheerful always. This kind of **abiding inner contentment is a sure corollary of devotion.**

Devotion & behavioural refinement

The succeeding propositions Krishna makes have great relevance in the interactional life of the devotee:

यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः ।

हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ॥

yasmān-nodvijate loko lokān-nodvijate ca ya: ।

harṣāmarṣa-bhayodvegair-mukto ya: sa ca me priya: ॥

(12.15)

One by whom the world is not troubled and who does not feel troubled by the world, who is freed from the clutches of delight and hatred, fear and anxiety, is very dear to the Supreme.

A devotee is supposed to be an excellent individual. Sādhakas should not forget this basic fact. In the name of devotion, none has the freedom or right to lead a haphazard, uncivilized or unrefined life, unmindful of all righteous norms. In fact, **devotion should enrich one with adequate goodness, elegance and refinement**, which are otherwise hard to acquire. The devotee should excel in character, behaviour and interactions with others. Only then devotional life will shine and be worthy of emulation by others.

Krishna thus insists that the world, despite all its complexities and contradictions, should not the least disturb or agitate the devotee. The devotee too should not prove harmful or troublesome to the society. The devotee will be able to imbibe and display this kind of spiritual elegance

and charm only when his mind is freed from the conventional agitations, namely *harṣa* (delight), *amarṣa* (resentment) and *bhaya* (fear). It is the mind's own swinging and swerving that result in harmful, displeasing or painful reactions. From a moderated, refined and expanded mind, whatever interactions follow will be quite endearing and enriching. This is what should transpire in the case of a devotee, says Krishna.

See how effectively Krishna incorporates true spiritual disciplines and sublimation in devotional life and pursuit! To make the pronouncement most effective, he states that only a devotee with such inner sublimity and enrichment will become dear to the Lord. What greater motivation, inspiration or compulsion can be there for any devotional seeker to look into his mind and bring about these refinements that represent true *sādhanā*?

Step by step Krishna presents the subtler refinements a devotee must imbibe and display:

अनपेक्षः शुचिर्दक्ष उदासीनो गतव्यथः ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥

anapekṣa: śucir-dakṣa udāsīno gata-vyatha: ।

sarvārambhaparityāgī yo mad-bhakta: sa me priya: ॥

(12.16)

The devotee, who is free of expectations, pure outwardly and inwardly, efficient, moderate and impartial, free of any strong afflictions, keeps away all sense of doership in all that he does or proposes to do, is dear to the Supreme.

Krishna thus includes *anapekṣatā* as another virtue. It means non-desiring, non-expecting. This single quality is worth contemplating upon throughout one's life. Devotion makes one rest upon the Supreme, with full reliance. As Supreme is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, where is the need for one who relies upon the Supreme, to wish for or desire anything any time? Is not the Supreme wise and competent enough to look after our needs and fulfillment? **Only when the mind is rid of desires, it becomes pure.**

Such a pure mind alone becomes worthy of inviting the right blessings and fruition every time.

To be clean inwardly and outwardly is a definite corollary of devotional life. There should be no lethargy in this. A devotee should keep his residence, place of work and the articles he uses, clean and tidy. **Cleanliness extended to mind and intelligence implies straightforwardness, openness and innocence in all ways.** This is the real spiritual quality that graces the seeker.

With regard to life and interactions, the devotee should always preserve an attitude of evenness, keeping preference or prejudice attentively away. Impartiality thus becomes a constant note in the devotee. To overreact to any event, person or action, is not proper. Likewise to lament or grieve for anything done, not done or being done is also not devotional. Human mind becomes the best when it is steeped in flexible harmony and integration.

Krishna stipulates something more as an inevitable corollary of devotional life. Devotee should be a *sarva-āraṃbha-parityāgī*, he says. This dictum must be understood with clarity. What does it mean? At no time should a true devotee feel that any event or undertaking in his life depends upon him, and he has to do it somehow. To arrogate to oneself the causality of an action and to foster doership about it is wrong. Normally such doership is not easy to remove from the mind. Dutifulness always infects the mind.

The philosophy of action, as explained earlier (3.27,28, 4.18,19, 6.1, 5.15,16) makes it clear that one must shun the feeling of *kartṛtva* and *bhokṛtva* with regard to anything whatsoever. This does not mean that the devotee will not be doing anything. In fact, he will be doing much more than what any other ordinary person will. Many benevolent activities of larger magnitude may result from him. But at no time should he suffer any kind of torment, thinking that he is the doer, sufferer or enjoyer. This is a unique spiritual loftiness or refinement. Not to foster any doership and at the same time to do all that is necessary, even with greater sacrifice and risk, is the call for a true devotee!

It is significant that Krishna enjoins all these as characteristics of a true devotee. By doing so, he emphasizes that a devotee must ensure goodness, propriety, moderation and excellence in his own character and behaviour. In other words, Krishna insists **that a devotee or seeker should be one in whom the best of human excellences and virtues are present**. Devotion should elevate one to a model man or woman, whom others will look to for inspiration. The devotee who becomes a repository of these virtues, mental and intelligential excellences, truly pleases the Creator. Naturally, it is for the earnest devotional seeker to enlist himself in this category of beautiful humans.

Harnessing the mind

Krishna continues to dwell upon the qualities that constitute devotional refinement and excellence. Spirituality is a profound subject, calling for thorough analysis and exposition. To understand it rightly, the seeker must be able to transcend the material level of existence and step boldly into the supra-material levels of mind, intelligence and ego to end with the Soul or the Self. It is natural that he finds the subject not comparable to whatever his senses are familiar with. At the same time, the information gained by the senses alone has to form the basis for spiritual study and analysis. This is intriguing, no doubt.

Our body, with all its limbs and senses, is but an instrument for the inner mind. Mind, in its turn, is to be led by the knowing intelligence. In fact, we already employ the mind and intelligence in whatever we do. An action, once done, passes away forever. What survives is only its memory, the mind-picture about it. The actor from then on uses this mental stock.

In spiritual pursuit, the emphasis on the mind and intelligence is enormous. Knowledge about these inner faculties consequently grows deeper, very soon making the seeker or devotee become more a mento-intelligential being than otherwise. **He begins to harness the mind-intelligence potential in greater measure as he advances in his spiritual pursuit**. Thus, spiritual pursuit becomes the most desirable for anyone.

Krishna relates devotional refinement to the mind and intelligence and lays down an assortment of dicta, all bearing upon one's understanding, attitude, objective and interactions.

See how he develops the subject further:

यो न हृष्यति न द्वेष्टि न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।

शुभाशुभपरित्यागी भक्तिमान्यः स मे प्रियः ॥

yo na hr̥ṣyati na dveṣṭi na śocati na kāṅkṣati ।

śubhāśubha-parityāgī bhaktimān-ya: sa me priya: ॥

(12.17)

He, who does not either revel or resent, gives vent to neither grief nor desire, who relinquishes the sense of auspicious and inauspicious on the ground of his devotion to the Supreme, becomes naturally dear to the Supreme.

The statement implies the entire spirituo-devotional sādhanā, refinement and enrichment. Devotion does not consist in merely thinking of the Supreme and making It an object of worship. To keep an idol or picture and invoke all religious feelings and express them in colourful ways can at best mark the beginning of devotional pursuit. These will soon have to be intensified and deepened to become a **wholesome pursuit engulfing the mind and intelligence, generating a constant note of refinement, sublimation and enrichment**. That is where Krishna's exposition becomes indispensable.

Harṣa means elation. *Dveṣa* means hatred, resentment or intolerance. *Śocana* means grief or affliction. *Kāṅkṣā* denotes desire, greed or possessive thoughts.

These are the natural mind-responses and reactions. All these fall under pairs of opposites, dvandvas and spiritually viewed, constitute every aspect of the world. Krishna says that the devotee should not allow his mind to be victimized, constricted or subdued by dvandvas. Generating these dvandvas is ingrained in us. But when one becomes a devotee or seeker, his attitude should surely change.

Consciously overcoming and sublimating dvandvas is the one message of Bhagavadgītā. In fact, it is so of all spiritual scriptures. Krishna made this call right from the beginning, with the exposition of the *sāṅkhya* wisdom (2.15, 38, 45, 48, 50, 56, 57, 64). Thereafter, he intensified it, clothing the message in different phrases (3.34, 4.22, 5.3, 5.19, 5.20, 5.23, 6.7, 6.29, 6.32, 7.28).

Viewed in whatever manner, **spirituo-devotional pursuit has the sole aim of making the seeker's mind non-dependent on the external world for its delight, stability and fulfillment.** It regards the inner personality as causal, the source, and outer personality, namely the body, as merely instrumental. The attention should therefore be shifted from the outer to the inner. It is to mark this shift that Self-realization is held high as a goal to be attained.

Our mind has the capacity to originate thoughts, generate reactions and bring forth various responses. It has equally the potential to refine, sublimate and unify all these and preserve homogeneity. The first part is generally known to all. The second part is very rarely cognized and is accessed only by the discriminating seekers and devotees. But when accessed, it will zealously lead the seeker to transcendental refinement and sublimity, generating thoughts and emotions from that level. It is a question of inspiring and guiding the mind properly.

For this, the right exposure and enlightenment that one gets from the Teacher, as did Arjuna from Krishna, are what count. **To be receptive to the exposure, to reflect upon it and orient the mind and intelligence accordingly, is the most important part of spiritual sādhanā.** The progress thereafter will be irresistible and exhilarating.

To be delighted with some things – be they events, circumstances or even persons – or to be resentful or hateful towards some others is, in fact, to strengthen the delusion. How does the same mind become delightful with some and hateful with others? The outer links in the process apart, the mind alone functions and generates the like and dislike.

If the mind is the originator of these contradictory notes, it can as well be free of them. It can rise above both. Spirituo-devotional life inspires the mind **to strike the sovereign, transcendental, homogeneous level above dvandvas**. The waves of *śōcana*, grief, and *kāñkṣā*, desire also have no place in the devotee's mind. Instead of preserving and intensifying them, as is generally done, the devotee must strive to attenuate them. In fact, spirituality means sublimation of all these contradictory notes.

Krishna, in the same strain, makes it clear that devotion means abandoning the notions of *śubha* (auspicious) and *aśubha* (inauspicious). Arjuna found the whole war to be inauspicious and leading to hell. Krishna pointed out that to believe so was a sheer delusion, the characteristic entrapment of the mind.

Interactional excellence in devotional pursuit

To think of the Supreme is to transcend all limitations, divisions, contradictions, opposites and be devoted to homogeneous, all-engulfing perception. Unless such wholesomeness and transcendence are displayed by the devotional mind, it disproves itself. By the strength, meaning and purpose of his devotional pursuit, the devotee must get to this singular transcendence, whereby his mind becomes free, homogeneous and sublime. This is true spiritual *sādhana*. One who does this is dear to the Supreme.

समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च तथा मानापमानयोः ।
शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु समः सङ्गविवर्जितः ॥
तुल्यनिन्दास्तुतिमौनी सन्तुष्टो येन केनचित् ।
अनिकेतः स्थिरमतिर्भक्तिमान्मे प्रियो नरः ॥

*sama: śatrau ca mitre ca tathā mānāpamānayo: ।
śītoṣṇa-sukha-du:kheṣu sama: saṅga-vivarjita: ॥
tulya-nindā-stutir-maunī santuṣṭo yena kenacit ।
aniketa: sthira-matir-bhaktimān-me priyo nara: ॥*

(12.18, 19)

Looking at the enemy and friend with equalness, reacting to respect and disrespect with evenness, receiving with equanimity *sukha* and *duḥkha* like cold and heat, remaining free of wrong identification, even-minded to blame and praise, given to spiritual silence and indifference, contented with whatever comes or goes, having no special attachment to any place, and with the mind unwavering – such a one is dear to the Supreme.

Krishna now shifts to the inter-personal front, which is the most complex part in human life and interactions. Individuals have their own preferences and prejudices. And these inevitably lead to liking some and disliking others. If for any reason, some one dislikes the devotee, what should the devotee think? Krishna is very clear that devotion should imply assimilation of everything and all. That includes accepting without resentment dislike and enmity from others. The earnest devotee should enrich and empower his mind to be at ease with friends or foes.

Not to be allured by *sukha* and not to be repelled by *duḥkha* is another distinction the devotee should gain every time. This will be possible only when the *saṅga* – the wrong identification – is eschewed by him. *Saṅga-vivarjitatva* is a sure note of devotional maturity.

In blame and adoration too, the devotee must search his own heart to find out whether there is any feeling of resentment or elation. A fullness of understanding will not allow him to be swung by anything.

Krishna lays down another devotional dictum that with whatever comes or goes, the devoted heart must be happy. The power of devotion is such that it makes one always cheerful. If any development or outcome takes place, then the right course will be to accept it unreservedly. Any conflict will only breed affliction. Is this not the same principle as contained in “*yadṛcchā-lābha-santuṣṭaḥ*”, being happy with whatever chance brings (4.22)?

Contentment results solely from the mind. **Mind can be discontented even with many things around. It can be contented**

with nothing around. Train the mind to be contented with whatever is available. Human life hosts untold potential for joy and freedom.

Aniketaḥ is a word Krishna has used in this verse. It evokes a great deal of doubt, imagination and even debate in the minds of seekers. To which extent can this concept take a zealous seeker? Is the message practical? Or is it that it has a hidden meaning, inaccessible to ordinary minds? *Aniketatva* however, carries great significance, especially when Krishna includes it in the concluding part of his definition of a dear devotee.

‘*Aniketaḥ*’ literally means one who has no place of dwelling. To be so will only please the Supreme, says Krishna. Devotional attunement will and should aim at such loftiness for the mind and intelligence. What can this mean?

Earlier also, Krishna has stated many such truths. Sannyāsa is not, he emphasized, renunciation of any physical or external activity. The *yukta*, integrated *yogī*, will not have any thought that he does anything, though his senses, like those of others, go on with their respective activities (5.8, 9).

The devotee has to realize that he is not the body, but the Soul. When the subtle, spiritual awareness becomes stronger and deeper, the gross material physical affinity becomes weaker.

Every one is, no doubt, born in some dwelling, be it a cottage or a palace. Like food and clothing, dwelling place is indispensable for a human. Where is then any question of a devotee being bereft of any dwelling place for him at all? To live means to live somewhere, in a residence.

Remember, the whole spiritual pursuit is – “*sva-saṃvedyaṃ, na tu para-pratyakṣam* – to be felt and experienced by oneself only, not evident to another.” This uniqueness about spiritual wisdom and truths must be clearly kept in mind. In other words, whatever value, discipline or refinement is laid down has its bearing upon the mind, intelligence and heart. *Aniketatva* is also something like this.

As desire, possessiveness, ego and association with external entities leave the spiritual mind, the identity with any specific dwelling place will also drop. This does not mean that a devotee should live on the streets or in a forest. As the soul dwells in the body, the body also has to be under a roof.

The evaluation and enrichment are to make the mind free and poised in any situation. As Krishna stated in the *sthita-prajñā* description “*yaḥ sarvatra-anabhisnehaḥ*” (2.57) – one who does not have undue attachment to blood, matrimonial, and other relationships or possessions – here also he is trying to lift the mind from its conventional constrictions.

Aniketatva only reflects what Krishna imparted in *sthita-prajñā-prakaraṇa* (section on stable-mindedness). He, who lives and moves in the world leaving all gross and subtle desires, rid of all possessiveness and egoism, alone has peace and blessedness (2.71). Just as the devotee should not have any possessiveness about his body, he should also not have about the dwelling place for his body.

Concluding the verse, Krishna brings in *sthira-matitva*. Devotional resignation and exclusiveness will have to make the mind and intelligence resolute and stable. Like *dṛḍha-niścayatva* mentioned earlier (12.14), *sthira-matitva* also emphasizes spiritual firmness and resolve. This means that the seeker is free of all doubts, desires, ego and possessiveness. The least insufficiency in any of these will make the mind waver. That should not be. Does not this confirm what Krishna said about the *sthita-prajñā* in the 2nd chapter (2.55)?

In conclusion, Krishna adds that his description of the ‘**dear devotee**’ and ‘**essence of devotional life**’ constitutes a full-fledged *dharma*, meaning a code of conduct or pursuit which has the capacity to sustain and enrich human life on earth. For one given to follow this *dharma*, no other aid, assistance or reinforcement is needed. Those who take to this with love, affinity, assiduousness and piety are extremely virtuous and dear to the Supreme, he assures (12.20).

This marks the conclusion of the second phase (Chapters 7 to 12) of Krishna's instructions in the Kurukshetra battlefield. This section is rich in devotional elements as against the earlier subtle philosophical dissertations.

Like the preceding *sthita-prajña* description (2.55-72) and the following *guṇātīta* description (14.22-26), this exposition on **who is a true and dear devotee** also stands distinct and unique, to be specially reflected upon. It is a touch-stone for all spiritual seekers and devotees any time anywhere. Its special note is that the whole description relates directly to devotee's mind and intelligence, showing clearly what should be their character and behaviour in actual life, making devotional life an adorable and effective interactional sādhanā.

